



ON TRACK

The E-Bulletin of the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers

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Issue # 113

February/March 2022

The Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, Inc. (MARP) is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit corporation established in 1973 to improve passenger train service, travel conditions for passengers, and to work for the preservation of historic rail stations.

Monthly meetings are held at locations around the state. Check the website for dates and venues. The public is invited to attend.

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2022 MEETINGS

20 January – Member Meeting
Legacy of the Pullman Porters

03 March – Member Meeting
Jim Mathews, Rail Passengers Assoc.
President & CEO

09 June – Member Meeting
Paul Trap, Early Michigan Railroads

25 August – Member Meeting
Michigan Short Line Railroads (tentative)

01 October - 49th Annual Meeting

Visit www.marp.org
Email marprail@yahoo.com

Restoration of Gulf Coast Service in the Hands of the Surface Transportation Board

Citing the failure of a sixteen year effort to re-establish the Gulf Coast passenger train service lost to Hurricane Katrina, Amtrak last year asked the **Surface Transportation Board** to intervene in the ongoing conflict with CSX and Norfolk Southern. A **pre-conference hearing** that spanned parts of two days, revealed a deep division between host railroad CSX and those who see restoration of passenger service between New Orleans and Mobile as vital to the economic, social, and environmental health of the region. Coming on the heels of the historic investment in passenger rail represented by the **Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act (IIJA)** passed by Congress last November, a decision unfavorable to Amtrak “would stop any expansion of American passenger rail in its tracks.” That was the warning issued by Jim Mathews, President and CEO of Rail Passengers Association in his comments before the STB on February 15. You may read his report on the hearing **HERE** or listen to his testimony **HERE**.

On March 3, Mathews spoke to 34 MARP members and friends via Zoom. He cited the \$66 billion for rail in the infrastructure bill as the culmination of years of advocacy work as well as a recognition by Congress of passenger rail as a vital part of the nation’s transportation network. However, he warned against complacency, **stating that there is much hard work still ahead** to achieve the transformation of the nation’s intercity rail made possible by the infrastructure bill.

Mathews cautioned that a decision in the Gulf Coast case unfavorable to Amtrak “will determine how quickly, or even if, new or expanded services will be possible.” Amtrak, CSX, Norfolk Southern, and the Mobile Port Authority will present their arguments in an evidentiary hearing before the STB on April 4. RPA is asking MARP members to join our voices with advocates across the country and sign a petition to be presented to the Board. Please go to page 2 of this bulletin to add your name. Your support for the people of Louisiana and Alabama who have been working hard to get their trains back will be appreciated!

**CLICK ON THE LINK AT THE BOTTOM OF PAGE TWO
TO ADD YOUR NAME TO THE PETITION!**

2022 Meeting Schedule

Due to ongoing concerns with COVID-19, MARP will continue to meet online using Zoom. Watch your email for announcements of upcoming meetings. The Executive Committee meets via Zoom on the third Wednesday of the month. If you have ideas to contribute, questions, or concerns please send them to us at marprail@yahoo.com. If you would like to sit in on a meeting, please contact MARP Chair John Guidinger at jhguidinger1@yahoo.com.

Amtrak Celebrates East Lansing Station Hosts

On the evening of February 5, 2022, Amtrak sponsored a Station Host recognition gathering at The Pizza House in East Lansing, honoring the small but loyal cadre of volunteer Station Hosts serving Amtrak's East Lansing Multimodal Terminal. Derrick James, Amtrak's Midwest Governmental Affairs Representative, hosted the event along with Steve Vagnozzi, MARP's Vice Chair and MARP station representative for East Lansing. Current Station Hosts Honey Bentley and Jerry Becker were able to attend, along with Honey's sister, former Station Host Kim Baker who now serves as the weekend caretaker for the East Lansing facility. Unfortunately, a third longtime host, Joy Gleason, was unable to attend.

As background, Amtrak, in cooperation with MDOT's Office of Rail, successfully launched the Station Host program in the fall of 2019. After being suspended twice due to the pandemic and the resultant closure of the East Lansing Multimodal Terminal, the East Lansing Station Host program was fully resumed last June. However, the original group of about fifteen hosts had dwindled down to the three volunteer hosts mentioned above. Currently, hosts are present for the westbound *Blue Water* on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday mornings. A host arrives about an hour before train time to greet and answer questions, and then to assist in the boarding of typically well over 100 passengers, many of whom are first time Amtrak riders.

Frequent questions from new riders include such queries as: "do we have to go through security screening, like at the airport?", "is the QR code on my cell phone considered a ticket?", and "do I have a specific seat assignment?" The hosts also work to locate Business Class passengers and conduct them to the proper car, and to identify group travelers to the conductors so they may be seated together as space permits. A benefit of these pre-boarding routines is that passengers can board more quickly and efficiently, thus ensuring on-time departures. And, if the train is a bit ahead of schedule, the hosts have an opportunity to chat briefly with crew members.

Joining the February 5th event were two newly recruited volunteers: John Boyse, recently retired from Michigan State University, and Dave Kowl, an active volunteer at both the Steam Rail Institute in Owosso and the Michigan Railroad History Museum in Durand. Nikkie Johnson, Passenger and Freight Development Mgr. in MDOT's Office of Rail, stopped by to extend her thanks for the dedication of the three Station Host honorees.



Passengers line up awaiting the imminent arrival of the westbound *Blue Water* Train No. 365 in this November 2019 photo. On a per train basis, the East Lansing station is the busiest Amtrak station in Michigan, sometimes seeing as many as 200 passengers boarding the morning train.

Photo courtesy of Mikenzie Frost sbgtv.com.

The gathering concluded with a surprise when Amtrak's Derrick James presented Ms. Bentley and Mr. Becker each a certificate of appreciation that included arrangements for a complimentary trip for two on any of Amtrak's three Michigan routes. Jerry says he anticipates using his gift to take his wife on a long-planned trip to visit their daughter in River Forest, Illinois. And one hopes Honey will treat her sister Kim to a fun weekend in the Windy City.

Yes, the East Lansing Station Host program can always use additional volunteers. If interested, please contact MARP Vice Chair Steve Vagnozzi at svagnozzi@comcast.net.



**CLICK HERE
TO SIGN THE
PETITION**

HAVE YOU SIGNED THE GULF COAST PETITION?

The Surface Transportation Board has heard from the public about the importance of restoring passenger train service between New Orleans and Mobile as a first step toward restoring – or launching – service for millions of Americans nationwide. The next step is to finalize the petition for submission to the Board's docket in this case. CSX has already mobilized its allies with a petition in opposition.

To send a message to CSX and the Surface Transportation Board, please join thousands of others across the country **by clicking here** to add your voice. The people of Mississippi and Alabama will thank you.



Time to Renew Your MARP Membership

You may renew online at marp.org/?page_id=4782

Or download a mail-in form at tinyurl.com/marp012

A BIG THANK YOU TO 143 RENEWING MEMBERS
AND A BIG HELLO TO OUR NEWEST MEMBERS,
MICHAEL KOPMEYER, ASHER STRAYHORN,
STEVE SLATON AND DAVID CISLO

Amtrak Michigan Line Schedule Changes

To accommodate track work taking place along the Amtrak Michigan Line over the next several months, *Wolverine* trains numbered 350, 352, and 353 will operate on revised schedules beginning March 7th, 2022.

Westbound Train No. 353 will depart Pontiac at 8:50am 48 minutes earlier than usual

Eastbound Train No. 350 will depart Chicago at 6:45am 35 minutes earlier than usual

Eastbound Train No. 352 will depart Chicago at 2:15p 50 minutes later than usual

Travelers are advised to carefully check reservation and boarding documents for the correct arrival and departure times for all stations between Pontiac MI and Chicago.

Mask Mandate Extended Through April 18

Following guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Transportation Security Administration, has extended the directive that travelers continue to wear face masks on trains, planes, and buses, as well as in and around stations. The directive is in effect until April 18 for individuals across all transportation networks throughout the United States.

CORRECTION

"What's in the infrastructure bill for rail?" on page 3 of the January issue. The Federal Railroad Administration is tasked with issuing, by 14 May 2022, a formal document "establishing" the **Corridor Identification and Development Program**, providing a general description of how FRA intends for the Program to function. The Program, as established by the Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act (IIJA) passed by Congress last November, is intended to create a foundational framework for identifying and developing new or improved intercity passenger services. Later in 2022, FRA will issue a more detailed Solicitation for Proposals.

MAKE YOUR PLANS NOW!



Pivot to Rail : Supply Chain and Mobility

The Michigan Rail Conference returns to the Upper Peninsula for its 10th Anniversary. The theme for this year's conference is "*Pivot for Growth: Supply Chain and Mobility*". The event will be held on the Bay College Campus in Escanaba, MI on August 1-3, 2022. Many events are being planned, starting with the annual golf outing and evening reception on August 1st, continuing with technical presentations on the 2nd, and field visits on the 3rd.

Conference details and registration information will be **posted on the website** as plans are finalized in the next several weeks. Check back often!

NOTE: *Because August is the height of the tourist season, it is recommended you make hotel reservations now. If your plans change, reservations can usually be cancelled without penalty.*

Michigan Line Speed Up Ten Years Ago

Mark Tomlinson, a railroad historian and prime mover in the **Kalamazoo Model Railroad Historical Society**, reminded us last month that it was ten years ago on February 15 that 110-mph hour service began on the Amtrak-owned stretch between Porter, Indiana, and Kalamazoo. Speakers on the platform at Kalamazoo on this wintery day included former 7th District Congressman and advisor to then Gov. Rick Snyder, Dr. John "Joe" Schwarz, MDOT Director Kirk Steudle, and FRA Administrator Joe Szabo.



[CLICK HERE TO WATCH THE VIDEO](#)

View from elsewhere . . .

“This modest Gulf Coast service restoration is something that many thousands of local residents want, and many millions of Americans need. It will produce an overall return on taxpayers’ equity of many times what will be invested to produce it. There is no real public evidence that operation of this service would unreasonably impair CSX or N-S operations, and what little evidence the host railroads have produced has been insufficient and unverifiable. Congress has spent millions of dollars over the years to advance this project, and after nearly two decades the Gulf Coast’s economies and the taxpaying public deserve to see it move forward. And Amtrak has a long-standing legal right to access host railroad infrastructure, for appropriate payment, supported over many years and through multiple iterations of rail-related law and regulation by Congress and policymakers alike.”

--From written statement by RPA CEO Jim Mathews to the Surface Transportation Board, 15 February. Read the entire statement [HERE](#). Watch [HERE](#) on YouTube.



Midwest’s Venture Cars in Revenue Service on Illinois Route

Four of the new Venture coach cars built by Siemens for Midwest routes began revenue service on the Chicago to St. Louis line in February. These cars will eventually see service on the state-supported routes in Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin and Missouri. More recently, a single Venture car has been spotted on the Hiawatha service between Chicago and Milwaukee, evidently for testing.

Photo courtesy of Rick Harnish

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